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## **Introduction: Sharing space? Sharing culture? Applied experiments in music-making across borders**

**Abigail Wood & Rachel Harris**

### **Performing ethnomusicology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

This issue of *world of music (new series)* has its genesis in a conference panel at the 2016 annual meeting of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology. The panel sought to revisit Ted Solís's influential volume *Performing Ethnomusicology* (2004), whose fifteen chapters explore diverse world music performance activities in universities, typically focusing upon large ensembles which sought to give students basic competence in—or at least exposure to the methods of learning and performance of—a single non-Western musical tradition. Like the authors in Solís's volume, we recognised the central role that performance continues to play in our professional lives as ethnomusicologists, and sought to probe the interface between the performance projects in which we are involved and our more “traditional” research activities. As Solís writes:

Many of us seem to feel that performing in or teaching an ensemble that stems from our primary research embodies more of what we are professionally, and reflects why we do what we do in more ways and more directly than nearly anything else. We bring the field with us to every rehearsal, constantly reassessing our theories and competencies. (*Ibid*: 2)

Nevertheless, we sensed that times were changing in both ethnomusicological thought

and practice. Reflecting the crisis of representation prominent in academic discourse in the 1990s, the contributors to Solís's volume are united by an overwhelming focus on representation. They debate how best to represent complex "outside" musical traditions to students and to audiences, and problematise the role of the ethnomusicologist, who often acted as mediator between the traditional practices of that tradition and the pedagogical demands of the North American academy, and stood in as representative of the musical tradition that they taught, while their students were largely assumed to be culturally distant from the tradition they were learning.

While recognising that such ensembles continue to play an important role in many university music programmes, in this issue we seek to focus upon performance less as an arena of pedagogy than one of culture sharing, examining the work done by applied music workshops and performances that seek to create bridges across cultures, to bring participants from different communities into shared spaces, to highlight shared heritage across political borders, and to probe the ways in which such practices might function as a research tool. Like the ensembles described in Solís's volume, most of the activities documented here took place in and around university music departments; nevertheless, the diverse case studies presented in this special issue broaden the perspective beyond North America, considering the work of scholars based in the US, UK, Australia, Iran and Israel, and encompassing spaces of musical interaction in Oman, Morocco, Liberia, Germany, Tajikistan and beyond. Here, shared spaces might be conceived as physical, acoustic and discursive, and as both inhabited and imagined (Johnson 2013: x), by both organizers and musicians. While all of the projects detailed in this issue brought musicians together into physical proximity and shared soundscapes, several contributions highlight that shared—even successful—musicking does not necessarily imply a neutral meeting ground or shared narratives to frame and make sense of sounds and experiences.

Further, these articles index three significant changes in the ontology and practice of ethnomusicologists during the decade and a half since Solís's volume was published: the increasing prominence of the subfield of applied ethnomusicology; the increasing legitimacy of musical fusion projects within ethnomusicology; and changing material

conditions including digital technology, low-cost flights, changes in higher education funding and increasingly restrictive border policies.

Scholars including Ana Hofman (2010), Arild Bergh and John Sloboda (2010), and Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon (2015) have documented the meteoric growth of applied ethnomusicology since the 1990s, and a concomitant shift from public folklore projects to ethnomusicological interventions focused on social advocacy and conflict resolution. While, as Pettan and Titon observe, earlier generations of ethnomusicologists were rather skeptical about applied ethnomusicology, distrusting implications of social engineering, in recent decades ethnomusicologists have increasingly sought to prove the utility of music-based projects beyond the academy, to intervene in unequal power relations, and to move from a model of ethnomusicological research as representation to one of partnership with research associates in the field. This trend has quickly been reflected in institutional structures: an Applied Ethnomusicology section in SEM was inaugurated in 1998, and around the same time symposia of the ICTM reflected similar topics, leading to the formation of a parallel Study Group on Applied Ethnomusicology (*ibid*:26; 46–7).

Ethnomusicologists in the 1990s were deeply concerned with the ethics of musical appropriation. Processes of musical recirculation were widely critiqued, seen as embedded in colonial hierarchies, part of a totalising system of globalisation that entailed top-down flows of culture, money and power. “Fusion” was a dirty word. Global forces with the power to represent and exploit local musics exercised hegemony over local communities in ways that typically brought profit to the power holders and further marginalised and exploited the holders of traditions (see for example Feld 1996; Zemp 1996).

More recent approaches have in turn critiqued this heavy emphasis on culture as difference. It is now axiomatic that cultures are not fixed and bounded entities, individuals may serially or simultaneously ally themselves to various different cultures, and cultural meanings and forms of cultural production are forged through processes of

mimesis, repetition and reappropriation. What is the appropriate repertoire for a UK university “Chinese Music Ensemble” when the core syllabus in China’s conservatoires currently includes Vittorio Monti’s rhapsodic concert piece Csárdás (a 1904 piece based on a Hungarian dance form, which also appeared in the classic 1951 Hindi film Awaara, and in Lady Gaga’s 2009 album *The Fame Monster*)? Anthropologist Henrietta Moore (2011) has called for a return to the notion of culture as an “art of living”, for a move away from views of globalisation rooted in the binaries of impact/response, capitalism/culture, Western/non-Western, focusing instead on the specific forms and means through which individuals imagine themselves in relation to others and to the world. She posits the ‘ethical imagination’ as one of the primary sites of cultural invention since it deals primarily with questions of the self in relation to others. Ethnomusicologists have also adopted the framework of the imagination, which, as Martin Stokes argues, “restores human agencies and creativities to the scene of analysis, and allows us to think of music as a process in the making of worlds rather than a passive reaction to global systems” (2007:6).

This shift in focus away from unequal encounters between fixed music cultures towards a focus on individual engagement in cultural flows and circulation acknowledges the increased intensity and complexity of contemporary global music flows, enabled by decentered, peer-to-peer distribution via the Internet. And yet, in spite of contemporary perceptions of the fluidity and performativity of identities, claims to belonging and emplacement continue to exercise considerable power over people’s imaginations and aspirations. Ethnomusicologists have recently drawn productively on Michael Warner’s (2002) ideas on imaginaries and publics as social formations based on an imagining mode of acquaintance. More recent work in the discipline traces the formation of groups who imagine themselves into being through their engagement with the circulation of styles of music (Dueck 2013; Novak 2013). Given this shift in the intellectual terrain, it is unsurprising that ethnomusicologists’ interests in performance have also spread beyond the confines of traditional “music cultures” to active participation in collaborations where the axes of contact are no longer “West” to “Other” but run along multiple lines of engagement. Moreover, these axes of engagement are understood as privileged sites for

breaking down the old and forging new identities. As cultural geographer Helen Wilson has recently argued, “encounters do not simply take place at the border but are rather central to the making and unmaking of them” (Wilson 2017: 456).

Substantial technological and political changes during the first two decades of the twenty-first century have also reshaped the material conditions within which ethnomusicologists work. Constant developments in communication technologies have minimised the distance between university and field site, facilitating the planning of projects between geographically distant areas, and enabling easier and greater sharing of musical materials than was previously the case. Almost all of the projects described in this issue used file-sharing services to enable project leaders to share musical materials in advance of rehearsals, or to edit the musical products in a geographically distant studio. Likewise, cheap flights have increased the mobility of musicians from middle to high-income countries, enabling whole classes of North American students (Frishkopf and Rasmussen) or large geographically dispersed ensembles (Balosso-Bardin and Wood) to make music in geographically distant locations. Mobility is also evident in the relationships embodied by researchers in this issue: in the following pages students frequently appear as collaborators in research, performance and writing, including our (Harris and Wood) own research students, Saeid Kordmafi and Jiryis Ballan.

Conversely, however, late capitalist economic conditions and increasingly restrictive immigration policies have curtailed some of the activities that formed a backbone of many of the ethnomusicology performance programmes described in Solís (2004). Cuts in higher education spending have limited the possibility for music departments directly to hire musicians for workshops or to faculty positions, and musicians from lower-income countries have frequently been denied entry to richer countries, including some of the musicians whose work is documented here.

### **Performance as applied ethnomusicology**

In his essay in this issue, Saeid Kordmafi provocatively asks whether the sonic outcomes

of collaborative musical projects are as important to today's ethnomusicologists as their social outcomes. Indeed, all of the musical collaborations outlined in this issue—including Kordmafi's own—seek to engender cultural conversation or social dialogue wider than the specific performance project that they describe. Nevertheless, Kordmafi's words highlight an all too common lack of sustained discussion of musical materials in the growing literature on applied ethnomusicology. One productive response to this perceived lack of interest in "the music" is the renewed disciplinary focus on performance as embodied practice. The contributors to this issue are perhaps less interested in musical outcomes than in musical processes. We may note the impact of the 'affective turn' in approaches to culture formation and meaning, and understandings of the ethical imagination as processes that are based not only in conscious thought and the privileging of language but also in affective experience, performance, and the placement and use of the body (Hirschkind 2006). This focus on performance and embodiment is fundamental to developing our understanding of the power of music to define and underpin social imaginaries and identities, which is not only due to its symbolic potential but also to its role in articulating the ways in which these identities are embodied and physically felt. Embodied responses to music are of particular interest in performances across borders as they highlight the learned and contingent nature of our musicality and our social identities. As Clayton, Dueck and Leante argue:

(...) music and musical interactions make demands on bodies, often pleasurable in the case of the music of one's own group, and sometimes threateningly or disorientingly in the case of music of social others. Positive or negative reactions to these demands often seem to come from deep within us, and consequently they are imbued with a sense of 'naturalness' that is in fact a marker of our enculturation. Our sense of selfhood and otherness is in this sense both visceral and learned.  
(Clayton et al. 2013:12)

Learning to acquire the new forms of embodied and sensory habitus—practices of listening, posture and movement—needed to perform a new musical genre or style requires extended exposure to the style, and practice (Brashier 2013). This emphasis on

sensory, or rather kinesthetic learning, is also an important theme the Solís volume. Gamelan teacher Hardja Susilo, for example, emphasises the importance of teaching students to think as Javanese musicians think, and feel that the gong marks the end of the phrase (Solís 2004: 58).

This kind of learning requires long-term engagement with a particular musical tradition: typically students in the Solís volume were taking year-long modules involving weekly lessons with an expert teacher, and sustaining their involvement in ensembles throughout their university career. This is very different work from that required in border crossing musical collaborations, which tend to be fast-paced, brief encounters that require swift results on the concert stage. Does it matter, Jasmine Hornabrook muses in this issue, if the Carnatic musicians perform in an eight beat *talam* and the students play in 4/4? In terms of how the end product sounds like to the target London audience, probably it does not matter too much. But if the rationale behind these projects is the transformative potential of the creative encounter, then it surely matters a great deal.

As the contributions to this issue suggest, in collaborative projects such as these, musicians commonly bridge the gap by drawing on their existing imaginative resources and bodily habitus. Harris, in this issue, describes how a Syrian jazz musician composes for Chinese pipa drawing on his memories of Hong Kong *kungfu* movie soundtracks. Musicians may also project the expectations of audiences and funders, and the perceived limitations of their collaborators. In Hornabrook's contribution, Sarangan—Carnatic musician and veteran musical collaborator—proposes a collaboration based in the pentatonic-sounding *raga* Mohanam, which he believes will meet audience expectations of an ‘oriental’ sound. “Don’t think in your own language or in your own music, instead find the sounds in common”, he says. This, and other examples in this issue, suggest that rather than reaching out across borders, musicians involved in cross-cultural collaborations are often seeking paths of least resistance towards shared musicking. Thus, close observation of the musical processes involved may challenge the ideological grounds on which such projects are based. As Dwight Conquergood has so eloquently argued, “[i]t is the imaginative traffic between different ways of knowing that carries the

most radical promise of new ways of seeing and understanding” (2002:145). Or hearing and performing, we might add, but such imaginative traffic takes time and effort to bring into being: things that funding restraints cannot always provide.

Ana Hofman has noted that “often unspoken assumptions mediate between ideology, scholarly work and public policy” (2010:27), but these assumptions are not unique to ethnomusicology. In *The Expediency of Culture* (2003), George Yúdice describes a recent shift in the understanding of the role of culture in the United States and Europe, from a worldview in which art was considered transcendental, valuable in and of itself, to one in which it is primarily regarded as a resource, whose role has expanded into political and economic realms. Yúdice attributes these changes both to increasing globalisation, which highlights diversity rather than unique national identities, and to changing attitudes prompted by the end of the Cold War, which had legitimated the view of art as transcendental (*ibid.*:11–12). Yet Yúdice’s opening discussion illustrates the vulnerability of this model to circular thinking:

At a recent international meeting of cultural policy specialists, a UNESCO official lamented that culture is invoked to solve problems that previously were the province of economics and politics. Yet, she continued, the only way to convince government and business leaders that it is worth supporting cultural activity is to argue that it will reduce social conflicts and lead to economic development.  
(*Ibid.*:1)

Such concerns seem well founded: in a recent survey of publications addressing music as a means of conflict transformation, Arild Bergh and John Sloboda note that music is frequently ascribed an exaggerated role that does not match participants’ experience; that imbalances of power are muted, yet the voices of organisers and facilitators tend to be heard rather than those of participants (and they tend to ascribe success to projects); and that projects are often too short-term, and are unsustainable. (2010:8–11)

These concerns raise a high bar for research-driven participatory music projects such as

those represented in this issue. In highlighting meeting points, or points of disjunction, in musical language itself (Harris, Kordmafi), the process of musicking (Hornabrook, Rasmussen), efforts made to reframe ingrained discourses of identity and difference (Balosso Bardin, Wood), and the problematic interface between theory and practice (Dieckmann and Davidson, Frishkopf), the eight essays following this introduction both illustrate a broad range of contemporary practice, and help to nuance uncritically affirmative notions of music's transformative potential. Crucially, several authors themselves reflect upon the challenges inherent in the realisation of such projects, noting points at which developments did not meet expectations, or in which musical practice was constrained in order to facilitate collaboration within a short timeframe, or to appeal to audiences.

This issue also raises important questions about the processes and power relations involved in realising such projects. In many cases, initial stages of the projects described here revealed a substantial mismatch between the initial expectations of the parties involved, whether in the presence of musical activity itself (Frishkopf), the capacity of North American students to perform Arabic music (Rasmussen), or the desire of musicians to engage in explicit cultural dialogue (Wood). While the seeming reciprocity of musical exchange is compelling, Ana Hofman notes that the power/knowledge relationships implied in applied projects may not actually produce reciprocity or an egalitarian relationship between the various participants (2010, 25). Disparities in economic status and social class are revealed in the nuances of discourse, in the (re-)framing of the end product, or simply in the ability to travel and participate.

Further, notwithstanding some welcome South-South collaborations, most of the projects described here continue to be shaped by researchers based in institutions in the global North. Taken together, these articles point to the need for greater critical engagement with the roles played by third-sector funders in applied ethnomusicology projects. While the majority of projects described here and elsewhere are depicted as direct collaborations between ethnomusicologists and groups of musicians, with many of whom they have longstanding relationships as students, colleagues and research partners, in many cases

funders—from traditional academic research funding agencies to arts organisations to local NGOs—loom uneasily as a silent third partner, whose expectations equally shape the progress of the project.

### **The chapters in this issue**

Anne Rasmussen's article in this issue is one of only two contributions that focus on a student ensemble, and—as the only contributor to have also featured in the Solís volume—she provides the link between that earlier collection and this one. Rasmussen considers the ways in which the William and Mary Middle Eastern Music Ensemble, which began life as a campus-based “class” in 1994, has developed a culture, following, and legacy that extends far beyond the classroom. She describes two examples of community-based collaboration during three international study and performance tours, in the Sultanate of Oman, and the Kingdom of Morocco, reflecting on the ways that these collaborations resonated with the new emphasis on activism and community engagement within the discipline of ethnomusicology, and exploring the ways in which these tours afforded new opportunities for her ensemble’s hosts as well as for her students.

Rachel Harris explores a series of case studies in musical collaboration along the “Silk Road”, the ancient trade routes brought to life in the contemporary imagination to link cultures from Europe to East Asia. The projects range from high profile professional collaborations supported by the Aga Khan Music Initiative to informal projects based at SOAS, University of London. Drawing on interviews with the participants and close observation of the rehearsal process, she highlights points of disjunction in the creative encounter: ways of imagining musical others and ways of hearing new musical styles that complicate and subvert the narratives that are supposedly being realised in performance.

Abigail Wood discusses a project bringing together a group of young musicians from Haifa, Israel, and Weimar, Germany, to form the Caravan Orchestra, a new ensemble that sought to reopen lost connections between cognate Jewish, Arab and European musics.

The Caravan Orchestra intersected with two musical meeting points that have received heavy attention in recent years: projects that bring together musicians from conflicting groups in the Middle East, and questions about Jewish and non-Jewish identities in the European klezmer scene. Nevertheless, while funders focused on the seemingly politically transformative potential of the project and the organisers focused on musical-stylistic conversation, the young musicians involved focused instead on musical practice and experience, preferring minimal identity statements and highlighting interpersonal rather than inter-group interactions.

Jane Davidson and Samantha Dieckmann discuss the development of an “intercultural choir” in Melbourne, Australia. The choir emerged from a “Lullaby Swap” project, a partnership between applied researchers and a not-for-profit community organisation that provides training and support to newly arrived and recently settled migrant communities. They mark a shift from policies promoting multiculturalism—support for discrete cultural heritage and the celebration of cultural or ethnic identities—and towards interculturalism—acknowledging and enabling cultures to circulate, to be modified and evolve, emphasising the space in-between and the possibilities offered by dialogic cultural exchange.

Saeid Kordmafi presents a cross-cultural composition and performance project undertaken during his Masters programme at the University of Tehran. As part of a wider interest in reviving the metered roots of Iranian classical music, Kordmafi travelled to Tajikistan to work with Abduvali Abdurashidov, a master of Shashmaqam. He discusses his own efforts to compose new pieces based on the longest and now largely obsolete metric cycles of the Shashmaqam repertoire, the process of dialogic musical editing with Abduvali, and audience responses to the pieces in Tajikistan and Iran.

Jasmine Hornabrook describes a collaborative music project, “The Songs of the Saints: Tamil Traditions and New Creativities.” The project was funded by the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Engagement Fund, a programme that supports projects that seek to build connections between universities and local communities. The

participants included London-based Carnatic musicians, two composers specialising in Indian and European art music, and music students at Goldsmiths, University of London. Hornabrook provides a detailed account of the negotiations involved in selecting and rehearsing repertoire, and questions of authority and leadership.

Cassandre Balosso-Bardin explores negotiations in repertoire and performance style in the practice of Världens Band, a professional ‘transglobal roots fusion’ band, imagined as a utopian social experiment by two Swedish brothers in 2012, and currently touring as thirteen musicians from seven countries: India, Senegal, Sweden, France, England and Scotland. How is the will to transcend musical borders and represent cultural inclusivity realised in the ideology, musical repertory and day-to-day rehearsal practices of the band?

Finally, Michael Frishkopf discusses a university summer program in Ghana, integrating academic and practical study of music, dance, and African studies with volunteer experience in Ghana’s Buduburam Liberian refugee camp. The article explores the idea of building bridges using the concept of a social network, not as a means of producing knowledge, explanatory or interpretive, but in order to construct and sustain social relationships.

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